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INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7213
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0580
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 0788
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1614
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkish, Greek Fighter Jets Collide over Aegean Sea
All papers report that a Greek pilot was killed yesterday after his fighter jet collided with a Turkish F-16 during a dogfight over the southern Aegean Sea. The Turkish pilot was rescued after ejecting from his aircraft. The Greek Defense Ministry said the Greek F-16 had been dispatched to intercept the Turkish jet because it had violated Greek airspace, while the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) claimed the crash was caused by a Greek fighter interfering in Turkish maneuvers in 'international airspace.' Foreign Minister Gul conveyed Turkey's condolences to his Greek counterpart in a telephone conversation, and the two agreed the incident would not affect bilateral ties, the MFA said in a statement. Turkey's Chief of General Staff General Hilmi Ozkok also called his Greek counterpart immediately after the collision. NTV reports that NATO sources essentially confirmed the Turks' version of events, and acknowledged that the Greek pilot had been at fault. Both sides reportedly agreed to establish a commission to discuss the issue of Aegean airspace in order to avoid such incidents in the future.

Turkish High Court Attack Investigation Continues
All papers report that lawyer Alparslan Aslan, the suspected assassin of a Council of State judge, said he did not receive an order to carry out the attack from Muzaffer Tekin, a retired army captain who is under investigation in connection with last week's shooting in which four other judges were also wounded. Tekin, the suspected ringleader in the attack, was found to have ties to a state-linked crime ring that came to light in the Susurluk scandal in 1996. According to police sources, the Council of State shooting incident has essentially been solved, but the 'key powers' behind the attack are still shrouded in darkness. Experts referred to the assailant as a professional hitman. Turkish police chief Gokhan Aydiner said the attacks against

the Council of State and Cumhuriyet daily were carried out by an 'illegal network,' but he declined to elaborate further. Many commentators, especially but not only in the Islamist-oriented press, believe the attacks were part of an operation to destabilize Turkey in a plot to force the ruling AK Party to go to early elections and thus influence the election of a new president that is scheduled to take place in the first half of next year. Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said in televised remarks yesterday that the illegal network might be a holdover of the 'Gladio-type' paramilitary organizations formed within NATO member countries during the Cold War. Sahin, the first official to make such a statement, expressed hope that the recent attacks will help eliminate the 'Turkish Gladio' in the way that most other NATO countries have already eliminated such structures. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Erdogan is expected to address his party group about the incident.

Wolfowitz on Council of State Attack, Turkish Economy
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Yeni Safak and others report World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz as telling a Brookings Institute panel meeting that the deadly attack on the Council of State aimed to disrupt Turkey's unity in which 'secularism and the respect for religion have lived side by side for a long time.' Wolfowitz also warned Turkey to follow through on IMF economic guidance to ensure future growth. 'I think there is no substitute for continued monetary and fiscal discipline. When you've had crippling inflation for so long, it's no surprise that there are fears it could come back. Recent cautions in the IMF report are a reminder that these reforms are necessary for Turkey's

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growth,' Wolfowitz said.

Mermoud Visits Ankara to Break Russian Monopoly on Natural Gas

Sabah reports that US Special Representative Frank Mermoud paid a visit to Ankara as part of his 'shuttle diplomacy' tour in the region to discuss plans for pipelines to transport Caspian natural gas to European markets through Turkey. Secretary Rice urged during her recent visit to Ankara that Russia be excluded from projects to carry Azerbaijani, Turkmen and Kazakh natural gas to Europe as part of a US-led effort to find alternatives to Russia's near-monopoly in gas distribution. Mermoud had lunch with the state-owned BOTAS pipeline company and Turkish Energy Ministry officials who do not want to limit Turkey's role to being a mere transit country, but are planning to develop a conceptual framework to sell to third countries as well. Mermoud moved on to the Caucasus after wrapping up his meetings in Ankara yesterday. (Editor's note: In fact, Mermoud visited Ankara several weeks ago. End note.)

Israel's Livni, Russia's Lavrov to Visit Turkey
Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak: Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is to pay a three-day state visit to Ankara from May 28-June 1, during which she will discuss Iran's nuclear program and economic assistance to Palestine with Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul. Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov will travel to Ankara May 31-June 1 to talk with Turkish leaders on bilateral issues as well as Tehran's nuclear aspirations.

Ankara Prepares New Cyprus Peace Plan

Cumhuriyet says that, dispirited by the outcome of the Greek Cypriot general elections, UNSYG Annan will not launch a new initiative on Cyprus. The paper adds that Turkey has started to prepare a new plan for peace on the divided island. According to the new plan, the Turkish Cypriots will decide in a 'Montenegro-type' referendum whether they want reunification or independence; if the Turks reject reunification, Ankara will take the Cyprus problem to the UN and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Amnesty International 2006 Report

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Zaman and others carry excerpts from the Amnesty International (AI) 2006 report on human rights violations across the globe. The report's section on Turkey highlights continuing problems in the areas of freedom of expression, torture, the rule of law, and imprisonment for conscientious objection. The report also claims that the reform process in Turkey has slowed over the past year.

Editorial Comments

The Picture of Turkey as Viewed from Washington

Asli Aydintasbas wrote from Washington in the mass appeal Sabah (5/24): "I am in Washington for the annual Sabanci conference, but today I am going to write about the atmosphere in Washington as it relates to Turkey. Leaving the Hamas visit, the Rice visit and the murder of a high court judge behind us, what is Washington's view about the AKP government? What we can say for sure is that there are two different camps in Washington regarding the AKP. One group sees the glass as half-empty, particularly in light of the March 1 decision. According to this group, the Islamic tendency within the AKP government is the main reason for the damaged relations. Although the Hamas visit to Ankara has almost been forgotten, it is noticeable that the Jewish lobby will never let the issue go. Also, issues like

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secularism and the presidential election in Turkey are followed closely here. I got the signal from high-level US officials that if Turkey's next president could keep good relations with the government and have a wife who doesn't wear a headscarf, tension will be defused in US-Turkey relations. I keep hearing Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul's name as this group's choice for the next president of Turkey. Now let me move on to the optimistic group. This group believes that, despite all the negatives, United States must be careful not to lose Turkey. This sentiment is mainly felt at the State Department. The optimistic group believe that even though the US cannot trust Turkey as before, the Americans will need Turkey in the future on a variety of issues, including Iran. Therefore, the US-Turkey relationship should not be damaged further. Although the optimistic group is in a minority, the fact that Secretary Rice is part of this group means it has more influence in the decision-making mechanism. This is the atmosphere Prime Minister Erdogan will face in Washington if he travels there this summer."

Serbia-Montenegro's Civilized Separation

Sami Kohen observed in the mainstream daily Milliyet (2/24): "After a public referendum, Montenegro announced its independence from Serbia in a very civilized way. The Montenegro example shows the world that it is not always possible for people with different national identities to live together under a single authority. In the Soviet Union and ex-Yugoslavia, the peoples' will for independence mainly came from the different ethnic, national and religious groups. The population of Montenegro is only 650,000. Will it be possible to have a viable state with such a small population? Well, there are states in the world that are even smaller than Montenegro, like Luxembourg and Malta. Montenegro, a paradise for tourism, has long-term aspirations to become a member of the EU. According to some officials, Montenegro could become a member within 5-6 years. All of this got me to think again about the Cyprus issue. If the Greek Cypriots do not want to live together with Turks on the Island, couldn't they separate in the same way Montenegro separated from Serbia? Because he seeks to rule the whole island, naturally Papadopoulos won't agree to such a separation. But while it is celebrating the independence of Montenegro, what would the EU say to this idea?"

TV Highlights
NTV (7 a.m.)

Domestic News

- Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said the government's top priority is unemployment, not the headscarf issue. 'It would be wrong for us to give priority to the headscarf issue, which has been a problem for only 1.5 percent of the population according to polls we have conducted,' Sahin said.

- Main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said statements by government officials in support of secularism are designed to disguise the real intentions of the ruling AK Party.

International News

- On Tuesday, Prime Minister Erdogan was received by Algerian President Bouteflika. The two sides signed a friendship and cooperation agreement later in the day. The visit of Erdogan to Algeria is the first by a Turkish Prime Minister in 21 years.

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- A bomb detonated outside a Shiite mosque in Baghdad, killing at least 11 and wounding several others.

- Pro-Serbia groups demanded a recount of votes in Montenegro's referendum on independence from Serbia, while Serbian President Tadic said Belgrade has accepted the outcome of the vote.

- Thousands of Iranian Azeris gathered on the streets of Tabriz and clashed with police as they protested against a cartoon in a state-controlled daily which depicts an Azeri boy being insulted by an Iranian child. The protest prompted the closure of the newspaper and the imprisonment of its managers.

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WILSON